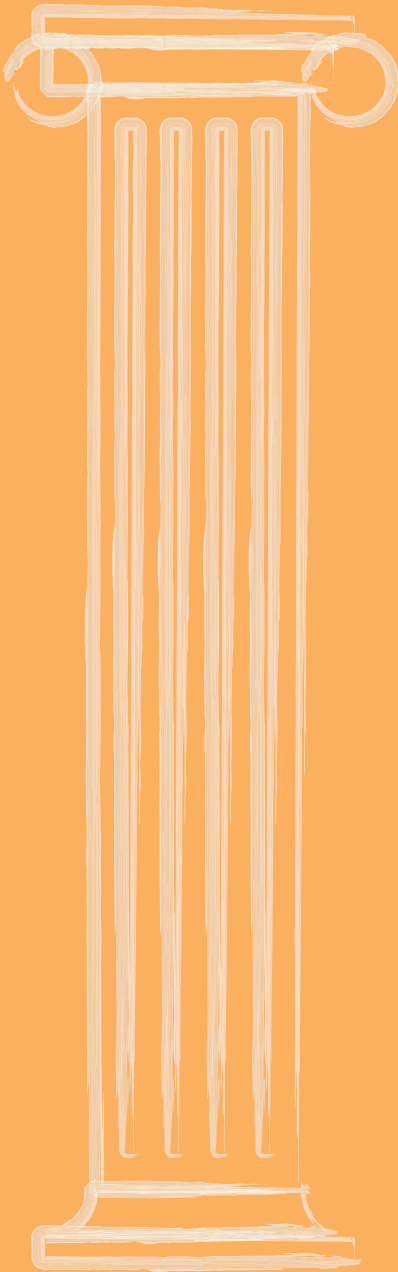




THE FORUM



VIRGINIA'S LABOR MARKET &
OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION
NEWSLETTER

Volume 6, Number 3

Fall 2006



Five Myths About Community Colleges

Like most misconceptions, community college myths are based on elements of truth. Like most misconceptions, these myths lead to mistaken beliefs that could warp your ability to choose the right post-high school educational path

for you. It's the truth about community colleges that sets you free from the bondage of what some in educational circles call the "snob factor." In fact, the truth about community colleges flies in the face of some overblown stereotypes.

There are many wrong assumptions about community colleges, but the top students at community colleges are among our country's greatest assets. **Walt Disney** went to a community college. So did renowned corporate executive **H. Ross Perot**, transplant surgeon **Daniel Hayes**, and NASA astronaut **Eileen Collins**. Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winners and several governors also graduated from junior colleges. Nationally, 40 percent of all traditional-age college students start out at community college, according to the U.S. Department of Education. So let's bust five of the most common myths about community colleges and let the truth speak for itself.



(continued on page 2)

In this issue:

Five Myths About Community Colleges	1-2	Products Order Form	7
Career Portfolios: Jobseekers Show Their Competencies	3	People Are Asking	8
The 10 Best-Paying Blue-Collar Jobs	4-5	Lifetime "Career" Changes	8
Finding a Job for Special Needs Workers	6		

(5 Myths about Community Colleges continued from page 1)

Myth: Students only attend community college because they can't get in to a four-year university.

Fact: Statistics refute this assumption. It may be true that, on average, community college students have lower SAT and ACT scores than university students, but many students attend community college for convenience, family, job, or financial considerations. Community college makes sense, purely for economic reasons. More students will use community colleges in the future because of the sheer cost of a university education. Community college students save on tuition and also on boarding because they can live at home during the first two years of school.

Myth: A degree from a community college is not as good as a university degree.

Fact: A community college degree can take you straight into the workforce or to an elite four-year university. Community colleges educate 62 percent of allied health professionals and over 80 percent of law enforcement officers and firefighters, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). Community colleges are not inferior. It is the first choice for many students because the first two years of college are really exploratory anyway and it costs so much.



Myth: Community colleges are inexpensive, so the education is not high quality.

Fact: Community colleges may be less expensive than four-year universities, but that doesn't mean you sacrifice a quality education. Classes in honors



programs at community colleges are smaller than university classes. The curriculum is often more in-depth and there is more open exchange between teachers and students. Community colleges tend to be the generic brand, but it's just as good a foundation as starting at a four-year university at half the price. Some community college graduates have gone on to Ivy League schools.

Myth: Community college credits do not transfer to four-year universities.

Fact: The quality of community colleges is getting better all the time. There are more communication agreements with four-year colleges for them to award credit for comparable courses taken at community colleges. You need to know what institution you want to attend, pay attention to their requirements, and choose your classes accordingly. The key is careful planning.

Myth: Community colleges have low academic standards.

Fact: While community colleges offer "open admission" that breeds diversity, all courses are not open admission. In fact, students usually have to take placement tests in order to qualify for college-level work. Technical and special programs have high standards and students compete to enroll. The idea that students go to community colleges because they can't hack it at a four-year university is ridiculous. Community colleges have stringent policies, but also offer students the extra support they need to succeed.

Source: Jennifer LeClaire, writer/reporter; www.jenniferleclaire.com



Career Portfolios: Jobseekers Show Their Competencies

“Don’t tell me—show me,” say some employers. Employers want evidence of jobseekers’ abilities. For many jobseekers, the proof is in the portfolio.

A career portfolio highlights a person’s major achievements and can include awards, letters of recommendation, and examples of work. Jobseekers present such materials to prospective employers, usually during a job interview.

Teachers, writers, and photographers are some of the workers who have long promoted themselves with concrete examples of their products. According to employment counselors, career portfolios can be useful to almost any jobseeker.

Part of a typical career portfolio includes standard jobseeker documents—such as a résumé, transcripts, and letters of recommendation. What would make a portfolio different are work samples, such as reports, plans, photographs, and in-depth descriptions of the jobseeker’s skills and experience.

Making a portfolio is simply a matter of organizing everything and presenting it in an interesting way; for example, using graphs or headings to focus attention on particular items.

For more information, visit your local library or career counselor. State employment offices may also have information. To view an example of a career portfolio, go to:

<http://facts023.facts.usf.edu /portfolio>.



Source: *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, Summer 2006



The 10 Best-Paying Blue-Collar Jobs

Working with your hands need not condemn you to a life on the economic edge. The right skills can bring above-average pay, and job security as well.

Times have been tough for America's blue-collar workforce. Union membership has been falling for years, and factory jobs in everything from textiles to cars have either been shipped abroad or disappeared in downsizing after downsizing. Despite all that, there are still some great, high-paying jobs for those who are more apt to wear hard hats and work boots than don pinstripes or tote a briefcase. While services may indeed make up 80 percent of today's economy, there are always going to be buildings that need constructing, air conditioners and refrigerators that need fixing, and goods that need to be delivered to department stores and supermarkets.

For those with the skills to work creatively with their hands, there's good money to be made in electrical work, carpentry, and other trades. A job as a diesel mechanic, repairing the engines that power transportation equipment like heavy trucks and buses, starts at \$20 per hour in the South and pays even more in more expensive areas like New York. As with other lucrative blue-collar occupations, these trades take training, but they promise steady work and better-than-average wages. It may take a couple of years, but then you can pretty much write your own ticket.

The same is true of heating and air conditioning repair, where a year or more of vocational training is usually required. But many grads go on to hook up with a small repair company for a starting salary of

between \$28,000 and \$45,000 per year. Eventually, those who are dedicated usually wind up running their own shops and making upward of \$200,000 annually.



The best-paying blue-collar job is that of a "public transit attendant," a category that includes subway conductors and railway engineers. Workers in that category average over \$62,000 a year.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics lists 238 job types that it officially qualifies as "blue collar," from masons and aircraft mechanics pulling in close to \$30 per hour to baggage porters and bellhops making about one-quarter of that. They combine to provide about 22 million American jobs, or approximately 15 percent of the workforce.

Unfortunately, the overall growth forecast for blue-collar jobs isn't promising. The segment is expected to stay flat for the next eight years, while white-collar services in education, health care, and employee placement are predicted to add more than 7 million jobs during the same period.

But those who have developed the skills necessary for the best blue-collar jobs—largely mechanics, installers, and equipment operators—find they're doing better than the average American, no matter the color of the collar. The average pay for the top 10 blue-collar jobs is just over \$27 per hour. Figuring 40 hours per week for 52 weeks per year, annual income adds up to \$56,347, or 30 percent more than the U.S. median income of \$43,318, according to the Census Bureau.

Just like in the white-collar world, certain sacrifices lead to higher salaries. Long-haul truck drivers—those who travel the country for days or weeks at a

time rather than opt for more family friendly short-hop routes—can rake in \$100,000 or more annually. Most long-haulers also get solid health insurance and 401(k) plans. What's more, a full trucking license only takes about four weeks to obtain before you're on the road. As long as that computer on your desk needs to be delivered—they know they will never be without a job.



Top 10 Best-Paying Blue-Collar Jobs

Rank	Job	Estimated pay
1	Public transit attendant	\$62,088
2	Longshore equipment operators	\$58,198
3	Brickmasters and stonemasons	\$57,200
4	Power plant operators	\$56,472
5	Locomotive operations	\$56,347
6	Aircraft engine mechanics	\$55,494
7	Electrical power installers and repairers	\$55,390
8	Mining occupations	\$54,704
9	Oil well driller	\$53,227
10	Telephone line installer/repairer	\$52,478

Source: Tom Van Riper, Forbes.com



Finding a Job for Special Needs Workers

Those with special needs, such as individuals who have little education or physical disabilities, can be discouraged.

Besides working with counselors who specialize in working with the special needs population, individuals can also do research on the Internet. The government and private agencies resource links below provide helpful information about job opportunities.

www.businessdisability.com

The National Business and Disability Council

www.nod.org

National Organization on Disability

www.jan.wvu.edu

JAN (Job Accommodation Network)

www.prideindustries.com

Pride Industries

www.nfb.org

National Federation of the Blind

www.ncoa.org

National Council on Aging

www.careeronestop.org

CareerOneStop

www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/onestop

One-Stop Career Centers

www.doleta.gov

The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

www.careervoyages.gov

Career Voyages

www.goodwill.org

Goodwill Industries International

Your local library or school career center – Don't overlook these great places. Ask a librarian or teacher for help. That's their job.

Source: www.careerkids.com

"Choosing to be positive and having a grateful attitude is going to determine how you're going to live your life."

—Joel Osteen

To order materials, please indicate the number of items requested on the line to the left of the product name and mail or fax to:

Virginia Employment Commission

LMDA, Room 213
P.O. Box 1358
Richmond, VA 23218-1358
Telephone (804) 786-8223
Fax (804) 371-0412

For large orders, please make sure that the address you list is for a physical location (not a P.O. box) and that you include the name of a contact person.

Please feel free to make copies of this order form.

NEW!!! Community Profiles...

Presenting the newly revamped *Community Profiles*! These documents feature a wealth of information including demographic, economic, and educational data. Each report is automatically updated every time we make changes to our database, so you can be assured they will always be up-to-date! To access this data, log on to <http://velma.virtuallmi.com>; or you may call (804) 786-8223 for more details.

THE FORUM is a quarterly newsletter of the Virginia Employment Commission. It is produced and distributed by the Virginia Employment Commission in Richmond. Articles are prepared by Marilyn Baker, Program Support Technician Senior. Layout, graphics and design by Linda Simmons.

The Virginia Employment Commission is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Editorial comments, change of address information, and publication requests should be sent to:

Don Lillywhite, Director
Economic Information Services
Virginia Employment Commission
P.O. Box 1358
Richmond, VA 23218-1358
Telephone (804) 786-8223 or
marilyn.baker@vec.virginia.gov

Products Order Form

These products are available at no charge, except where noted.

Quantity

Also on
VELMA[‡]

_____ **Bookmark**—the high school graduate versus the high school dropout

_____ **Industry and Occupational Employment Projections: Statewide and Workforce Investment Areas (WIA) 2002–2012***

_____ **Job Interview Pocket Résumé**—small tri-fold résumé that fits in a wallet or pocket

Also on
website

_____ **Virginia's Mid-Atlantic Guide to Information on Careers (MAGIC)**—contains information on job training, education, job-seeking, and careers
Minimal fee charged for orders outside Virginia. Contact us for details.

Also on
website

_____ **Virginia Business Resource Directory**—how to start your own business
_____ hard copy
_____ CD-ROM

Also on
website

_____ **Virginia Job Outlook 2002–2012**—top occupations, annual number of openings, and annual average salaries by educational attainment

_____ **Virginia Labor Market Information Directory***—listing and description of VEC publications, products, special services, and data delivery systems

Display posters

_____ **Skills Needed for Success in the Workplace**—24" × 18"

_____ **Visualize - Starting Your Own Business**—24" × 18"

_____ **Interview Tips**—18" × 24"

_____ **One-page information sheets**—camera-ready version to print multiple copies. Check desired information sheet.

_____ **Eight Keys to Employability**

_____ **Fastest-Growing Occupations, U.S. Data**

_____ **Sample Application Form**

_____ **Ten Most-Wanted Skills**

_____ **Education Pays . . .**

Available only
on VELMA[‡]

Occupational Wage Data Report: 2005*

United States
Statewide, Virginia
Local Workforce Investment Areas
Virginia Metropolitan Wage Data (MSAs)
Occupational Employment Statistical Regions
Planning Districts

* Reference materials only.

[‡] Access VELMA: velma.virtuallmi.com.

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Telephone (____) _____

E-mail address _____

Is this order for a scheduled event? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, date needed by: _____

(Please allow 5 – 7 business days for delivery)

Shipping Charge (VEC Staff Only)

Cost Center

Project Code

Function Code



Lifetime "Career" Changes

How many times does the average worker change careers? Statistically speaking, no one knows.

One idea that is commonly—but incorrectly—attributed to the U.S. Department of Labor is that people change careers about seven times in a lifetime; however, the Labor Department does not gather that kind of data.

The major problem in collecting such data is the difficulty in defining what a "career change" is. Is it a switch in occupations or career fields? Maybe it's a promotion. What about workers who change employers but stay in the same occupation? Because there is no clear definition, accurate counting of career changers is difficult, if not impossible.

However, the Labor Department's U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does collect data on job change: the switch from one employer to another or a switch from one occupation to another while working for the same employer. What's the number of job changes? The average is about 10 jobs for workers between ages 18 and 38, according to current data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979.

Whatever the average number of jobs or careers, one fact is certain: Most people make many changes during their working lives. To help, the Department of Labor provides job-market information and job-search advice. For more information, write to the U.S. Department of Labor, Frances Perkins Building, 200 Constitution Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20210; call toll-free, 1 (866) 4-USA-DOL (487-2365), TTY toll-free, 1 (877) 889-5627; or visit online, www.dol.gov/dol/audience/aud-unemployed.htm.

Source: David Terkanian, BLS economist

People Are Asking...



What is the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System?

The 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system is used by federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data. All workers are classified into one of over 820 occupations according to their occupational definition. To facilitate classification, occupations are combined to form 23 major groups, 96 minor groups, and 449 broad occupations. Each broad occupation includes detailed occupation(s) requiring similar job duties, skills, education, or experience.

For more information on the SOC system, please visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics' website at www.bls.gov/soc/home.htm.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

THE FORUM

VIRGINIA'S LABOR MARKET & OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

Virginia Employment Commission

Labor Market & Demographic Analysis
P.O. Box 1358
Room 213
Richmond, Virginia 23218-1358

Address Service Requested



FIRST CLASS MAIL
US POSTAGE PAID

Permit No.
1657

